DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 618 EA 023 802

TITLE	Selecting Fair and Equitable Learning Materials.
INSTITUTION	Saskatchewan Dept. of Education, Regina.
PUB DATE	Mar 91
NOTE	14p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Bias; Cultural Differences; Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Guidelines; Individual Differences; *Instructional Material Evaluation; *Media Selection; Racial Balance; Sexism in Language; *Stereotypes; *Textbook Bias
IDENTIFIERS	*Saskatchewan

ABSTRACT

The media selection guidelines in this booklet have been developed to further emphasize fairness and respect for all individuals in Saskatchewan (Canada) schools. The six forms of bias that may appear in learning materials include: (1) invisibility--underrepresenting certain groups; (2) stereotyping--assigning rigid roles or attributes to a group; (3) imbalance/selectivity--presenting only one interpretation of an issue, situation, or group of people; (4) unreality--portraying contemporary and historical life experiences unrealistically; (5) fragmentation/isolation--separating issues related to certain groups from the main body of the text; and (6) linguistic bias--using language that fails to represent both genders or that patronizes older persons or people with disabilities. After discussing the importance of adopting a selection policy and using historically biased classics to help students develop critical thinking skills, the booklet raises several questions specific to portrayal of women and men, people from various cultures, people with disabilities, and older people. An annotated list of four reviewing aids is included, along with ordering information. (MLH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED347618

Saskatchewan
Education

Selecting Fair and Equitable Learning Materials

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Cameron

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 023 P02

Recycled Paper

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

March 1991

Selecting Fair and Equitable Learning Materials

Saskatchewan Education
March 1991

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Saskatchewan Education
Selecting fair and equitable learning materials. -- Regina : Saskatchewan Education, 1991.
12 p.

Bibliography: p. 12.

1. Nonsexist language -- Textbooks. 2. Textbook bias.
I. Title

371.331

Why Guidelines are Needed

The Goals of Education for Saskatchewan emphasize respect for all individuals. The educational system is based upon the belief that each individual has value as a human being and should be respected as a worthwhile person. Teachers and administrators try to help students interact and feel comfortable with people who are different from themselves in gender, race, religion, social level, or personal attributes (***Directions***, 1984). The guidelines for the selection of learning materials in this booklet have been developed to further those goals.

The first step in reducing bias is learning to recognize it. There are at least six different forms of bias that may appear in learning materials. They include:

- invisibility--under-representation or non-representation of certain groups;
- stereotyping--assigning traditional or rigid roles or attributes to a group;
- imbalance/selectivity--presenting only one interpretation of an issue, situation or group of people;
- unreality--unrealistic portrayals of contemporary and historical life experiences. Controversial topics are glossed over and discussions of discrimination and prejudice are avoided;
- fragmentation/isolation--issues relating to people of both genders, people with disabilities, people from various cultures, and people who are older are separated from the main body of the text;
- linguistic bias--language which fails to represent both genders or patronizes people with disabilities, people from various cultures, and people who are older. (McCune & Matthews, 1978)

It is important that teachers and administrators are able to recognize their own biases and also biases that appear in learning materials. When teachers and administrators are aware of their own biases, they can take the steps necessary to ensure that those biases do not influence their interactions with students. Teachers who are able to recognize bias in curriculum materials can design educational experiences that pass on this valuable skill to students. Moreover, teachers who can recognize bias in educational materials are better equipped to select the best materials available for use in their classrooms and their schools.

Learning materials play a significant role in shaping children's views about the world. Children pattern their behaviour and beliefs on what they see and hear in the society around them. They are influenced by the books they read and by the films and videos they view. Therefore, it is important that the learning materials students use in school portray respect and dignity for people of both genders, people of specific cultural groups, people with disabilities, and people who are older. This booklet provides

guidelines for selecting learning materials that fit this description. The guidelines apply to textbooks, and to print and audiovisual materials in the school library collection.

The guidelines begin with a series of general questions that apply to all four groups. The general questions are followed by sections which address each of these groups separately, and present more specific points that teachers and teacher-librarians should consider when selecting learning materials.

Teachers, teacher-librarians, and principals are encouraged to photocopy this booklet and to use the checklists which follow as working tools when selecting materials.

The Importance of a Selection Policy

The guidelines in this booklet are just one set of criteria to be used when selecting instructional materials. They should not be used in isolation. Selection of all instructional materials should be done within the context of a school division's selection policy and a school collection development policy.

The purpose of a divisional selection policy is to establish the philosophy and purpose of the school library within the context of provincial, divisional, and local goals of education. It defines a set of principles that underlie the development of the collection and makes general statements delegating responsibility for selection. A policy statement is an important vehicle to communicate division and school practices and responsibilities to parents, trustees, principals, teachers, and teacher-librarians.

According to ***The Education Regulations***, 1986, section 37, school divisions are required to develop divisional policies for selection of materials.

Provincial regulations and the divisional selection policy provide overall guidelines for materials selection. However, each individual school within the division is unique and thus has needs that arise out of the requirements of its curriculum and the nature of its students. These needs make it necessary for a school to draft and adopt its own policy statement on collection development. A school-based collection development policy establishes specific and practical goals for individual collections and provides a rationale for growth.

Saskatchewan Education's publication, ***Learning Resource Centres in Saskatchewan: A Guide for Development***, discusses division and school-based selection policies and provides a sample policy that school divisions may wish to use as a guide.

Putting Selection Guidelines into Practice

Applying the guidelines stated in a division or school selection policy is a complex task requiring professional expertise and judgement. Each individual item must be evaluated carefully with reference to curriculum objectives. Those materials that are to be included in the school library must be considered in relation to the collection as a whole, since the collection as a whole should provide students with a variety of perspectives and sources.

The collection as a whole should reflect the needs and interests of students. For example, the collection in a rural school may be different from that in an urban school, and the collection in a school in northern Saskatchewan may be different from that in a school located in the southern part of the province.

Developing Critical Thinking

Some materials, because of their nature, contain an inherent bias. For example, many classic works of literature and historical documents reflect viewpoints and biases of the era during which they were written. This type of material can be used as a tool to aid in the development of critical thinking. Lessons can be structured to help students recognize the bias, to interpret it within an historical or cultural framework, and to relate it to the world of today.

The ultimate objective should be to equip students with knowledge, skills, and values that will allow them to analyze materials and to identify biases that may be present in materials they read, hear, or view.

General Questions

This booklet includes sections on portrayal of women and men, people of various cultures, people with disabilities, and people who are older. Each section includes questions specific to the group being addressed. In addition, there are general questions that should be asked about any instructional resource to assess whether it is fair and equitable. These questions include:

___ 1. Are adjectives that stereotype individuals and groups avoided? Such adjectives include the *primitive* cultural group or the *little old* lady.

___ 2. Do the illustrations reflect society as a whole? That is, are people of both genders, people with disabilities, people who are older, and people from various cultures represented in the same proportion as they are in society as a whole? Are females and males both shown taking the initiative and providing leadership? Portrayals of relationships in pictures may be very subtle. Note things such as facial expression, body positions, and location of people and objects.

___ 3. Are people of both genders, people with disabilities, people from various cultures, and people who are older shown with a full range of personality characteristics? Material that gives the impression that all girls are timid, all boys brave, or all older people sweet is inappropriate.

___ 4. Are people of both genders, people with disabilities, people from various cultural groups, and older people shown expressing the full range of human emotions? The fact that everyone feels anger, sadness, joy or pride at various times should be evident.

___ 5. Is reference to a person's gender, age, culture, or disability avoided unless it is directly relevant to the material? Such references include the *woman* judge, the *male* secretary, the *Indian* lawyer.

___ 6. Are people of both genders, people with disabilities, people from various cultural groups, and people who are older shown in control of their lives, solving their own problems, and making their own decisions?

Portrayal of Women and Men

Non-biased instructional materials show people of both genders as being equal; neither is consistently subservient nor dominant. Benefits and privileges are assigned on the basis of ability and individual preference rather than gender. The experiences and viewpoints of people of both genders are presented. Questions to ask about the portrayal of men and women in instructional material include:

____ 1. Are both women and men shown having various abilities such as musical talent, athletic prowess, intellectual ability, mathematical skill?

____ 2. Are people of both genders shown working outside the home in a variety of professional and non-professional jobs?

____ 3. Are people of both genders shown as equal contributors to the organization and management of the home?

____ 4. Are gender roles in novels incidental to the characterization and plot? Would the characterization and plot be plausible if the gender roles were reversed?

____ 5. Are the achievements of females based on their own initiative or intelligence rather than on their good looks or their relationship with males?

____ 6. Are words and expressions based on the term *man* avoided? *Letter carrier* is preferred to *postman, people* to *mankind, chairperson* to *chairman.*

____ 7. Is parallel language used when describing males and females? Use *ladies and gentlemen* or *women and men*, but not *men and ladies.*

____ 8. Is use of the pronoun *he* avoided when referring to both men and women or people in general?

____ 9. Are female-gender or diminutive word forms avoided? Words such as *poetess* and *authoress* are inappropriate.

____ 10. Are historical events and developments presented so that both female and male activity and achievements are evident?

____ 11. Are excerpts from historical documents that show people of one gender or the other in a negative way explained in the accompanying text or narrative?

Portrayal of People From Various Cultures

Materials used in schools should show respect for people of all cultural backgrounds. In materials that are fair and equitable, accounts of the experiences of people from various cultural groups are presented from their viewpoints and events occurring in specific cultures are evaluated against the standards and expectations of that culture. This is the case for presentations of all peoples world-wide.

Questions to ask about the portrayal of cultural groups in instructional materials include:

____ 1. Are stereotyped images of cultural groups avoided?

____ 2. Are people from all cultural groups shown working at various occupational levels?

____ 3. Are a wide variety of first and last names used in fiction and in examples? For example, last names should include names such as *Wong, Standingready, Schultz*, and *Zatylny*, as well as *Smith* and *Jones*.

____ 4. Are the customs, lifestyles, traditions, and beliefs of people from various cultural groups shown as having value and meaning for the people concerned, not as exotic, peculiar, or bizarre?

____ 5. Are living conditions described within the context of the culture and not compared to North American middle-class life?

____ 6. Are a variety of viewpoints presented when the struggles of people from various cultural groups to obtain their rights are described? These struggles should not be dismissed as rebellions, riots, or revolts.

____ 7. Are Aboriginal cultures presented as having a long history and tradition--not as being discovered by Europeans?

____ 8. Are excerpts from historical documents that show people of specific cultural groups in a negative way, discussed in the accompanying text or narrative?

____ 9. Are individuals and family groups illustrated in a variety of lifestyles, economic classes, and geographic locations? For example, are Aboriginal peoples shown living in urban areas, rural communities, and both on and off reserves?

Portrayal of People with Disabilities

Human abilities exist on a continuum. In fair and equitable learning materials, stereotypes that are often associated with physical or mental disabilities are avoided. It is recognized that a physical or mental disability is just one of many characteristics that can be attributed to an individual. A distinction is made between a disability and a handicap. A disability is a specific impairment resulting in a lack of function; for example, a visual impairment. A handicap is a disadvantage resulting from an impairment; for example, lack of employment and inaccessibility to buildings. Questions to ask about the portrayal of people with disabilities in instructional materials include:

___ 1. Is the disability seen as one characteristic of the individual rather than as the definitive factor?

___ 2. Is the distinction between the meaning of the words *handicap* and *disability* observed?

___ 3. Are clear distinctions made among the various forms of mental disability, and between mental disability and some types of physical disability?

___ 4. Are negative images of people with disabilities that occur in literature discussed in text or narrative?

___ 5. Are adults with mental disabilities portrayed as adults, with a broad range of personal characteristics?

___ 6. Are people with disabilities shown in a broad range of jobs at all levels?

___ 7. Are generalizations about people with disabilities avoided? Is it recognized that there is tremendous diversity within this group of the population?

___ 8. Are people with disabilities shown in a variety of situations and participating in a variety of activities, not just in passive roles. For example, are they shown shopping, working, attending parties, cooking, having fun, participating in family life, providing leadership?

Portrayal of People Who are Older

Fair and equitable instructional materials show people who are older as being in control of their lives and making decisions about the things that affect them. Age is respected and is not presented in a negative way. Questions to ask about the portrayal of people who are older in instructional materials include:

____ 1. Are negative and stereotyped images of people who are older avoided? Such images include the *sweet old* woman, the *grouchy old* man.

____ 2. Is it recognized that people who are older may have varying levels of physical and mental ability?

____ 3. Are people who are older shown in visuals with a variety of hair colours and body shapes in addition to the traditional plump, gray-haired image?

____ 4. Are people who are older shown in a variety of situations and participating in a variety of activities, not just in passive roles? For example, are they shown shopping, participating in sports, working, driving cars, and providing leadership?

____ 5. Is aging shown as a natural part of life, not as something to be feared or avoided?

____ 6. Are people who are older shown interacting with people of other age groups in a positive way?

For Further Reading

Saskatchewan Education. (1984). ***Beyond bias: Informational guidelines for reducing negative bias in instructional materials***. Regina, SK.

(Order from Indian and Métis Education Branch, Saskatchewan Education, 2220 College Avenue, Regina, SK, S4P 3V7. Free.)

Guidelines for evaluating the presentation of Aboriginal peoples in learning materials. Written specifically for the Saskatchewan situation.

Saskatchewan Education. (1988). ***Learning resource centres in Saskatchewan: A guide for development***. Regina, SK.

(Order from Saskatchewan Book Bureau, 1330 Winnipeg Street, Regina, SK, S4R 1J8. Order No. BB 5239. $2.00.)

A detailed guide to the planning, organization and development of school learning resource centres. Includes information on selecting materials for school use.

Simon, R.I., Brown, J., Lee, E., and Young, J. (1988). ***Decoding discrimination: A student-based approach to anti-racist education using film***. London, ON: Althouse Press.

(Order from Althouse Press, Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario, 1137 Western Road, London, ON, N5G 1G7. ISBN 0-920354-21-1. $9.95.)

Detailed lesson plans which illustrate how specific Canadian films can be used to educate students about racism.

Slapin, Beverly, & Seale, Doris. (1988). ***Books without bias: Through Indian eyes*** (Rev. ed.). Berkeley, CA: Oyate.

(Order from Oyate, 2702 Mathews Street, Berkeley, CA, 94702. ISBN 0-9625175-0-X. $40.00.)

Contains a series of bibliographic essays on the treatment of Aboriginal people in literature, a checklist of criteria to use when selecting materials related to Aboriginal people and reviews of books written from an Aboriginal point of view.

References

The following materials were used as background during the preparation of this document.

Council on Interracial Books for Children. (1980). ***Guidelines for selecting bias-free textbooks and storybooks***. New York, NY.

Saskatchewan Education. (1988). ***Learning resource centres in Saskatchewan: A guide for development***. Regina, SK.

McCune, Shirley, and Mathews, Martha. (eds.). (1978). ***Implementing title IX and attaining sex equity: A workplace package for post-secondary educators***. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Minister's Advisory Committee on Curriculum and Instruction Review. (1984). ***Directions: The final report***. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Education.